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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: RABBI LAZAR SEES ANTI-SEMITISM DOWN DURING TENSE
TIME IN MOSCOW

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle for reason 1.4(d)

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary. The Ambassador met with Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar on September 4 to discuss anti-Semitism in Russia and the aftermath of the South Ossetian conflict, including perceptions of Russia's international intentions. Lazar said that potential for a worsening in relations existed should Russia not withdraw from Georgia, but remained confident that Russia would meet its international obligations. He claimed to receive much of his Kremlin information from Presidential First Deputy Chief of Staff Vladislav Surkov, a figure Lazar believed to be on the rise. Lazar felt Russian society continued to increase its tolerance for Judaism, crediting Putin for much of the improvement and seeing Medvedev as a continuation of Putin's pro-Jewish stance. As proof of improvement in the Jewish community, Lazar pointed to immigration from Israel and the growth of his own synagogue in Moscow. End Summary.

Lazar on Events in South Ossetia

[¶2.](#) (C) Lazar expressed concern about recent tensions, yet ultimately remained certain that the South Ossetia conflict would not accelerate into a downward spiral in bilateral relations. Lazar told the Ambassador that the United States and Russia had entered the toughest period ever in their history, even considering the numerous storms weathered during the Cold War. Despite the tension of the Cold War, Lazar believed that less was at risk in the past, but now almost two decades of developing ties in business, religion, and politics were at stake. This most recent conflict was the "first test" between old rivals.

No Targeting of Jewish Community After Georgia Conflict

[¶3.](#) (C) Lazar listed Vladislav Surkov as his main Kremlin source for information on current affairs, and indicated that Surkov's influence in the Kremlin has grown tremendously in the past three years. Surkov had calmed Lazar's worries about a new wave of anti-Semitism in Russia after the South Ossetian conflict. Considering past instances of anti-Semitism that erupted in Russia during times of trouble, Lazar expected some sort of backlash, official or unofficial. However, the tolerance exhibited in Russia since the onset of fighting indicated to Lazar that Russian society's tolerance continued to improve, with fewer instances of anti-Semitism reported each year. He pointed to the success of his own synagogue as an example. Additionally, in his consultations with other ethnic and religious leaders in Moscow, Lazar noted a similar relief -- no widespread reports of anti-ethnic violence or government crackdowns.

Putin and Medvedev: Pro-Jewish?

[¶4.](#) (C) Lazar called Putin the most pro-Jewish leader in

Russian history, referring to his deep admiration for Israel and the Mossad, his trip to a kibbutz, and his cooperation with the Jewish community. With the recent warming of ties between Israel and Russia under Putin, Lazar noted the increase in Russian reverse immigration from Israel, estimating 100,000 Jews had returned in the past four years. He cited Putin's tolerance as a principal reason for the uptick. Regarding Medvedev, Lazar foresaw a continuation of Putin's legacy, even finding Medvedev to be more naturally inclined as a compassionate leader. He warmly reminisced about Medvedev's last trip to his synagogue in early 2008, just a few days before the presidential election, noting Medvedev's authenticity as a person. Lazar suggested Medvedev should receive global recognition as president, but conceded that Putin still truly controlled the government.

Lazar on Jewish Community Issues

15. (C) Lazar stressed that past squabbles within the Jewish community had quieted down. He had heard very little from the other claimant of the title of Chief Rabbi of Russia, Adolph Shayevich, nor from Chief Rabbi of Moscow Pinchas Goldschmidt. Concerning the contested Schneerson Collection, Lazar considered unwise any new legal proceedings against Russia that could be initiated by the U.S.-based Chabad Lubavich community for the return of the archives, especially considering recent events. He hoped that both sides would use diplomatic means to resolve the conflict while admitting that he tried to distance himself from the issue.

BEYRLE